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PATENT

Transmitted herewith for filing is the Patent Application of:

Inventor(s): Martin J. Pagel

For: EVIDENCING AND VERIFYING INDICIA OF VALUE USING SECRET KEY CRYPTOGRAPHY

Enclosed with the Patent Application are:

Six (6) sheets of Drawings
 Declaration and Power of Attorney
 Assignment and Recordation Form
 Information Disclosure Statement (PTO Form 1449)
 Small Entity Status Declaration
 Self Addressed, Stamped Postcard

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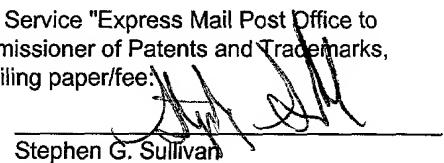
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EXPRESS MAIL CERTIFICATE

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Attorney Docket: 1775P
Page 1 of 2

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In re Application of:

Pagel, M.

Serial No.

Filed: Herewith

For: **EVIDENCING AND VERIFYING INDICIA OF VALUE
USING SECRET KEY CRYPTOGRAPHY****DECLARATION CLAIMING SMALL ENTITY STATUS
UNDER 37 CFR 1.9(f) and 1.27(c) SMALL BUSINESS CONCERN**

I hereby declare that I am

the owner of the small business concern identified below:
 an official of the small business concern empowered to act on behalf of the concern identified below:

NAME OF CONCERN	E-Stamp Corporation
ADDRESS OF CONCERN	2051 Stierlin Court
	Mountain View, California 94043

I hereby declare that the above identified small business concern qualifies as a small business concern as defined in 13 CFR 121.3-18, and reproduced in 37 CFR 1.9(d), for purposes of paying reduced fees under section 41(a) and (b) of Title 35, United States Code, in that the number of employees of the concern, including those of its affiliates, does not exceed 500 persons. For purposes of this statement, (1) the number of employees of the business concern is the average over the previous fiscal year of the concern of the persons employed on a full-time, part-time or temporary basis during each of the pay periods of the fiscal years, and (2) concerns are affiliates of each other when either, directly or indirectly, one concern controls or has the power to control the other, or a third party or parties controls or has the power to control both.

I hereby declare that rights under contract or law have been conveyed to and remain with the small business concern identified above with regard to the invention entitled **EVIDENCING AND VERIFYING INDICIA OF VALUE USING SECRET KEY CRYPTOGRAPHY** by inventor(s) Martin J. Pagel, described in application filed herewith.

The rights held by the above identified small business concern are not exclusive, each individual, concern or organization having rights to the invention is listed below* and no rights to the invention are held by any person, other than the inventor, who could not qualify as a small business concern under 37 CFR 1.9(d) or by any concern which would not qualify as a small business concern under 37 CFR 1.9(d) or a nonprofit organization under 37 CFR 1.9(e).

*NOTE: Separate verified statements are required from each named person, concern or organization having rights to the invention averring to their status as small entities. (37 CFR 1.27).

Attorney Docket: 1775P
Page 2 of 2

I acknowledge the duty to file, in this application or patent, notification of any change in status resulting in loss of entitlement to small entity status prior to paying, or at the time of paying, the earliest of the issue fee or any maintenance fee due after the date on which status as a small entity is no longer appropriate. (37 CFR 1.28(b))

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code, and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application, any patent issuing thereon, or any patent to which this declaration is directed.

NAME OF PERSON SIGNING:

Martin J. Pagel

TITLE OF PERSON OTHER THAN OWNER:

Chief Technical Officer

ADDRESS OF PERSON SIGNING:

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Martin J. Pagel
Signature

6/30/00

Date

**EVIDENCING AND VERIFYING INDICIA OF VALUE USING
SECRET KEY CRYPTOGRAPHY**

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present invention is related to co-pending U.S. Patent Application Serial No. _____

entitled "Evidencing Indicia of Value Using Secret Key Cryptography," which is
assigned to the assignee of the present application and filed on the same date as the present
application.

5

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to Internet postage solutions, and more particularly to evidencing and verifying any type of indicia indicating the value of goods or services using secret key cryptography.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Systems for allowing consumers to print postage indicia on mail, rather than purchasing stamps from a post office, are well-known. An example of such a system is an
15 Internet postage system solution that was developed by the assignee of the present application. As shown in FIG. 1, the system includes a United States Postal Service (USPS) certificate authority 10, an operations center 12, a postage generating device 14 coupled between a user's PC 16 and a printer 18, and multiple USPS distribution centers 20, which also act as postage verifiers upon receipt of the mail.

15

20 A combination of software running on the user's PC 16 and the postage generating

device 14 enables the user to purchase postage from the operations center 12 via the Internet using a variety of payment options. Once obtained, the postage is secured and stored in the postage generating device 14. The user may then print a stamp in the form of a USPS-approved information based indicia (IBI) 22 onto envelopes, labels, or directly onto mail pieces while also printing the destination and return addresses. The IBI 22 is printed as a 2-D barcode that typically includes various information including the name of the user, the ID of the device, the amount of postage remaining, the zip code of the destination, and the date.

Since digital imaging, printing, photocopying, and scanning technology make it fairly easy to counterfeit the IBI 22, cryptographic methods, such as asymmetric public key cryptography, have been employed to generate and validate the IBI 22. In the prior art system shown in FIG. 1, for example, the certificate authority 10 transfers a digital certificate, which is a digitally signed public key, and a certificate ID to the postage generating device 14 via the operations center 12. When generating the IBI 22, the postage generating device 14 uses an internally generated private key and the public key to digitally sign the indicia, thereby creating a digital signature. The digital signature and the certificate ID are then included in the IBI 22.

After printing the stamp and applying it to the mail piece, the mail piece is dropped in a local mailbox. The local post office then transfers the mail to a local or originating distribution center 20a. The originating distribution center 20a scans the IBI 22 using a barcode scanner to read the information on the stamp including the certificate ID and the digital signature. The originating distribution center 20a uses the certificate ID to request from USPS authorization center 10 the same digital certificate used to sign the indicia in order to verify whether the IBI 22 is acceptable or fraudulent. All mail pieces with

acceptable IBI's 22 are then sorted by the first three digits of the zip code to determine the destination region. The sorted mail is then transferred from the origination distribution center 20a to the respective destination distribution center 20b located in the destination region. The destination distribution center 20b then finishes sorting the mail based on remaining digits of the zip code and the mail is delivered.

Many variations exist to the above scheme for evidencing and verifying postage. For example, US Patent 5,982,896 describes a symmetric fixed key set approach whereby instead of using a private key for each postage generating device 14, a set of keys is created where each key in the set is shared by multiple postage generating devices 14. In addition, the keys are made valid for only a limited amount of time to minimize the harm created by the theft of any of the keys and to limit the time for key attack.

Generating time-limited keys, however, requires that new keys be generated periodically and distributed to the postage generating devices 14. Because the step of distributing the keys typically occurs over the Internet or a private communications link, security for the keys becomes paramount. It is also important to ensure that only authorized devices use those keys.

The method described in Patent 5,982,896 for securing the keys has several disadvantages. One disadvantage is that the set of the shared keys used by the postage generating devices 14 are downloaded to the originating distribution centers 20 or other postage verifier. The shared keys are individually identified by pointers, which are also downloaded to the postage verifier, but are not cryptographically protected. Thus, the postage verifier has in its possession the entire set of cryptographic keys used by the postage generating devices 14. This fact makes the postage verifier a single point of attack: if the

verifier is broken into, a perpetrator may easily impersonate all postage generating devices
14 in the postal system.

Accordingly, what is needed is an improved method for evidencing and verifying
postage indicia. The present invention addresses such a need.

5

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides a method and system for evidencing payment of
indicia using secret key cryptography. The method and system include a plurality of indicia
generating devices that are divided into groups for generating and printing indicia on a
media that is to be received at a plurality of establishments, wherein the establishments are
associated with different geographic designations. The method and system include assigning
a plurality of verification keys to each indicia generating device in each of the groups,
wherein each of the verification keys assigned to each of the groups is encrypted as a
function of a respective geographic designation. A key ID is associated with each of the
verification keys and is encrypted as a function of the same geographic designation used to
15 encrypt the corresponding verification key. After the verification keys and key ID's are
assigned, each one of the establishments receives the verification keys and the key ID's that
were encrypted as a function of the geographic designation associated with the
establishment. When generating indicia for media destined for a particular one of the
20 establishments, the indicia generating devices evidence the indicia by generating one of the
verification keys and the corresponding key ID assigned to indicia generating device's group
based on the geographic designation associated with the particular establishment, and uses
the generated verification key to create a digital signature. The indicia generating devices

digitally sign the indicia by including the digital signature and the generated key ID in the indicia. Upon receiving the media at the particular establishment, the indicia on the media is verified by using the key ID on the indicia and the distributed verifications keys to compute a digital signature, and comparing the computed digital signature with the digital signature on the indicia.

5

In one embodiment, the method and system are used to generate and print indicia on media such as tickets, coupons, and the like that will be received by establishments, such as movie theatres and restaurants, for instance. In the preferred embodiment, however, the method and system are used to generate and print indicia for postage on mail that is to be received at a plurality of distribution centers. In this embodiment, the indicia printed on the mail is preferably verified at destination distribution centers, but may also be verified at an originating distribution centers.

According to the preferred embodiment of the method and system disclosed herein, postage validation is now performed at destination distribution centers, rather than at originating distribution centers, and the verification keys, which are encrypted as a function of the destination, are only distributed to the corresponding distribution centers. Thus, even if a destination center were broken into, the perpetrator would only be able to forge postal indicia for mail pieces destined for the particular destination. In addition, the key ID is also encrypted so that even if a perpetrator were to crack a verification key, the perpetrator would still have a problem identifying which verification key was obtained. In order to forge the indicia, the perpetrator must possess two keys, rather than one, a secret key that the PGD used to compute the key ID, and the verification key itself.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram illustrating a prior art Internet postage system.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram illustrating a postage evidencing and verification system in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

5 FIG. 3 is a flow chart illustrating the process of evidencing payment of postage using secret key cryptography in the evidencing and verification system of the present invention.

FIG. 4 is a flow chart illustrating in detail the process the KDC uses to generate and distribute cryptographic keys for postage evidencing and verification in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. 5 is a flow chart illustrating the process of dispensing and evidencing postage indicia within the postage generating devices in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 6 is a flow chart illustrating the process of verifying postage indicia at a plurality of postal distribution centers in accordance with the present invention.

15

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The present invention relates to using key cryptography for evidencing and verifying postage. The following description is presented to enable one of ordinary skill in the art to make and use the invention and is provided in the context of a patent application and its requirements. Various modifications to the preferred embodiment and the generic principles and features described herein will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art. Thus, the present invention is not intended to be limited to the embodiments shown but is to be accorded the widest scope consistent with the principles and features described herein.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram illustrating a postage evidencing and verification system in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, where like components from FIG. 1 have like reference numerals. In a preferred embodiment, the system includes a key distribution center 24, a plurality of postage generating devices (PGDs) 14, and multiple USPS distribution centers 20. The PGDs 14 may be implemented as a computing device separate from the PC 16 (FIG. 1), as software running on the PC 16, or any processing device, such as a cellphone or PDA, or any combination of the two. The function of the key distribution center 24 is to provide the cryptographic keys used by the PGDs 14 to evidence postage, and used by the distribution centers 20 to verify the postage. In a preferred embodiment, the key distribution center 24 distributes the cryptographic keys to the PGDs 14 and to the distribution centers 20 via a telecommunications network, such as the Internet or private link, although other types of distribution methods may also be used. In a preferred embodiment, the key distribution center (KDC) 24 authenticates and distributes the keys via asymmetric encryption to ensure the privacy of the keys and that only authorized devices receive the keys. The KDC 24 may be the USPS certificate authority, or other third party service.

FIG. 3 is a flow chart illustrating the process of evidencing payment of postage using secret key cryptography in the evidencing and verification system of the present invention. Referring to both FIGS. 2 and 3, the process begins by the KDC 24 dividing the PDG's into n groups 26, G_i , $i = 1, \dots, n$, in step 28. The KDC 24 then in step 30 assigns a set of verification keys 21, V_i , to each PGD group 26, where each verification key in the set is encrypted as a function of one of the destination regions. In a preferred embodiment, each destination region corresponds to a zip code region, so the number of verification keys

assigned to each PDG group 26 depends on the number of existing zip code regions (shown in Fig. 2 as Dest1...Destx).

The KDC 24 also assigns in step 32 a set of key ID's 23, I_i , to each PDG group 26, where each key ID in the set is associated with one of the assigned verification keys and is encrypted as a function of the same destination region used to encrypt the corresponding verification key. Referring to Fig. 2, the result of steps 30 and 32 is that the column of verification keys 21 and key ID's 23 { V_1 and I_1 } are assigned to PDG group G_1 , the column of verification keys and key ID's { V_i and G_i } are assigned to PDG group G_i , and so on.

Referring again to FIG. 3, in a preferred embodiment, it is also required that postal verification of the postage indicia be performed at the plurality of destinations regions, rather than the originating region, in step 34. The postage verification may be performed at the destination distribution centers 20b or by a third party verifier that is in remote communication with the KDC 24.

After assigning the verification keys 21 to the PGD groups 26, the KDC 24 distributes to each distribution center the sets of verification keys 21 and key ID's 23 that were encrypted as a function of the corresponding destination region in step 36. Thus, in Fig. 2 for example, all the verification keys 21 and key ID's 23, $V^{\text{Dest}1}$ and $I^{\text{Dest}1}$, respectively, would only be distributed to the Distribution center in the destination region designated as "Dest1".

According to another aspect of the present invention, when generating the postage indicia for a mail piece destined for a particular destination, in step 38 the PGD 14 generates one of the verification keys and its corresponding key ID from the set of keys assigned to its group based on the particular destination. By requiring the PGD 14 to generate the

verification key, rather than distributing the verification key to the PGD 14, a perpetrator cannot infiltrate the PGD 14 and copy the verification key. The PGD 14 then uses the generated verification key to create a digital signature for the indicia using any well-known message authentication code (MAC) function, and digitally signs the indicia by including the digital signature and the generated key ID on the indicia in step 40.

When the mail is received at the destination region, the indicia is verified using the key ID from the indicia, and the verification keys received from the KDC 24, to compute a new digital signature for the indicia, and by comparing the computed digital signature with the digital signature on the indicia in step 42.

FIG. 4 is a flow chart illustrating in more detail the process the KDC 24 uses to generate and distribute cryptographic keys for postage evidencing and verification in accordance with the present invention. The KDC 24 begins by creating a master secret key 25, K , and a set of secret keys 27, and assigns each secret key, K_i , to one of the PDG groups, G_i , in step 52.

The KDC 24 in step 54 also generates and assigns a set of n verification keys, V_i^{Dest} , $i = 1, \dots, n$, for each PGD group G_i , where each of the verification keys is calculated as a function of a respective destination region. In a preferred embodiment, each postage verification key V_i^{Dest} is computed as a one-way function of the PGD group secret key K_i and the designation of the postal destination:

$$V_i^{Dest} = H(K_i, Dest)$$

where H may be a one-way function such as md5 (Message Digest 5) or sha-1

(Secure Hash Algorithm-1), and *Dest* is a designation of the destination region, which in a preferred embodiment, is the first three digits of the destination ZIP code or a first few characters of the postal code.

After generating the verification keys, the KDC 24 in step 56 generates and assigns a set of key ID's, $I_i^{Dest}, i = 1, \dots, n$, for each group, where each key ID corresponds to one of the verification keys assigned to that group and is also generated as a function of a respective destination region. In a preferred embodiment, each key ID is computed as a one-way hash function of the PGD group, G_i , the master secret key, K , and a designation of the destination, *Dest*:

$$I_i^{Dest} = H(K, Dest, G_i)$$

It should be noted that the size of the key ID is selected such that there are no collisions among the key IDs for a particular destination designation.

According to one aspect of the present invention, the keys are distributed in such a manner that each PGD 14 is made unaware of which group verification key V it will use to evidence postage indicia. This is accomplished by transferring only the master secret key K and the group secret key K_i to all PGD's 14 in group G_i in step 58. In addition, only the verification keys V_i^{Dest} and Key ID's I_i^{Dest} generated as a function of a particular destination region are transferred to the corresponding distribution center in step 60, rather than transferring all of the groups of verification keys to all destination distribution centers. In a preferred embodiment, the verification keys V_i^{Dest} and indexes I_i^{Dest} are stored in secure tables at the distribution centers 20.

After all keys have been distributed, the PGDs 14 may perform the process of

dispensing and evidencing postage indicia.

FIG. 5 is a flow chart illustrating the process of dispensing and evidencing postage indicia within the postage generating devices 14 in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. The process begins in step 70 by receiving a master secret key K and a secret key K_i from the KDC 24. In response to receiving a request from a user to generate an indicium for a mail piece destined for a particular destination $Dest$, the indicium is generated in step 72, and the verification key V_i^{Dest} is computed in step 74 as a function of the secret key K_i and the destination. In a preferred embodiment, the PGD 14 computes the verification key V_i^{Dest} using the function H :

$$V_i^{Dest} = H(K_i, Dest)$$

The PGD 14 also computes the encrypted key ID I_i^{Dest} as a function of the destination in step 76. In a preferred embodiment, the PGD 14 computes the key ID I_i^{Dest} using its assigned group designation G_i , the master secret key K shared between all postage-generating devices, and the designation of the postal destination $Dest$:

$$I_i^{Dest} = H(K, Dest, G_i)$$

The PGD 14 evidences the indicia in step 78 by creating a digital signature for the indicia using the verification key V_i^{Dest} and digitally signs the indicia by including the digital signature and the computed index I_i^{Dest} on the indicia. The mail piece bearing the postage indicia is now ready for mailing and subsequent verification.

FIG. 6 is a flow chart illustrating the process of verifying postage indicia at a plurality of postal distribution centers in accordance with the present invention. First, in step

90 each of the destination distribution centers 20 receives from the KDC 24 a set of verification keys V_i^{Dest} and the key ID's I_i^{Dest} that were generated as a function of the destination region the distribution center 20 services. In a preferred embodiment, the keys are delivered over the Internet and stored in a secure table.

5 In response to receiving a mail piece, each of the distribution centers 20 determines the mail piece's destination region in step 92. If the distribution center is not within the destination region, then the distribution transfers the mail piece to the destination distribution center 20b within the destination region in step 94.

If the distribution center is within the destination region, then the distribution center begins verifying the postage indicia by reading the digital signature and the key ID from the indicia in step 96. The key ID read from the indicia is then used to retrieve the corresponding verification key that was used to create the digital signature from the table containing the verification keys in step 98. The retrieved verification key is then used to compute a new digital signature from the indicia, and the computed digital signature is then compared with the digital signature from the indicia to verify the indicia in step 100.

In accordance with a second embodiment of the present invention, the verification keys and the key ID's are computed as a function of the originating distribution region, rather than the destination region. In this embodiment, the each distribution center 20 still receives the verification keys computed as a function of the region the distribution center services, but the PDGs 14 compute their verification keys based on the originating region where they are located (e.g., the zip code of the return address), and verification of the postage indicia is performed at the originating distribution center where the mail is deposited.

In accordance with a third embodiment of the present invention, the evidencing and verification system may also be used for issuing and evidencing any indicia indicating the value of goods and/or services, such as tickets, coupons, and gift certificates, for instance. In one embodiment, an indicia generating device generates and prints indicia on a media that is
5 to be received at various predetermined destinations. For example, the key distribution center 24 may provide cryptographic keys to a chain of movie theaters, for instance. In this system, the key distribution could service the movie theater chain and issue separate keys for different venues. The operator of each local movie theater could download new keys from the key distribution center 24 periodically (e.g., everyday). In turn, moviegoers having access to a PGD 14 would then download the master secret key and the secret key for their device group from the local movie theater via the Internet. After receiving the keys, the PGD 14 would print and evidence movie tickets, and each movie theater would perform the verification function for verifying the tickets.

Thus, the present invention is applicable to generating and evidencing indicia of value for any media that is to be received at establishments associated with geographic designations, such as addresses and zip codes.
15

The indicia evidencing and verification system in accordance with the present invention offers significant advantages over prior methods for verifying cryptographic postage evidencing. One advantage is that the verification center is no longer a single point
20 of failure in the postal system, since the verification center does not contain all the verification keys. Because the present invention performs verification only at destination distribution centers 20b and encrypts the keys as a function of the destination, even if a destination center 20b were broken into, the perpetrator would only be able to forge postal

indicia for mail pieces destined for the particular destination. Security is not as tight in the second preferred embodiment, however, where the keys are encrypted as a function of the origin and verification is performed at the originating distribution centers 20a, because if an originating distribution center 20a were broken into, the perpetrator would be able to forge postal indicia for all mail pieces as long as every mail piece was mailed from that particular originating distribution center 20a .

Another advantage is that since the PGD 14 encrypts the key ID and sends the key ID along with the verification key on the postage indicia, even if a perpetrator were to crack a verification key, the perpetrator would still have a problem identifying which verification key was obtained. In order to forge the indicia, the perpetrator must possess the secret key that the PGD 14 used to compute the key ID, and the verification key itself. This means that the perpetrator must possess two secret keys rather one in order to forge the postage indicia.

The present invention has been described in accordance with the embodiments shown, and one of ordinary skill in the art will readily recognize that there could be variations to the embodiments and any variations would be within the spirit and scope of the present invention.

In addition, software written according to the present invention may be stored on a computer-readable media, such as a removable memory, or transmitted over a network, and loaded into the key distribution center computers, the user's PC, the PGD, and distribution center computers for execution. Accordingly, many modifications may be made by one of ordinary skill in the art without departing from the spirit and scope of the appended claims.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1 1 A method for evidencing payment of indicia using secret key cryptography in a system
2 including a plurality of indicia generating devices that are divided into groups, each of the
3 indicia generating devices for generating and printing indicia on a media that is to be
4 received at a plurality of establishments, wherein the establishments are associated with
5 different geographic designations, the method comprising the steps of:
6 (a) assigning a plurality of verification keys to each indicia generating device in
7 each of the groups, wherein each of the verification keys assigned to each of
8 the groups is encrypted as a function of a respective geographic designation;
9 (b) associating a key ID with each of the verification keys and encrypting each
10 key ID as a function of the same geographic designation used to encrypt the
11 corresponding verification key;
12 (c) distributing to each one of the establishments, the verification keys and the
13 key ID's that were encrypted as a function of the geographic designation
14 associated with the establishment;
15 (d) using one of the indicia generating devices to generate indicia for media
16 destined for a particular one of the establishments, and evidencing the indicia
17 by
18 (i) generating one of the verification keys and the corresponding key ID

assigned to indicia generating device's group based on the geographic designation associated with the particular establishment, and

- (ii) using the generated verification key to create a digital signature, and digitally signing the indicia by including the digital signature and the generated key ID in the indicia; and

(e) upon receiving the media at the particular establishment, verifying the indicia on the media using the key ID on the indicia and the distributed verifications keys to compute a digital signature, and comparing the computed digital signature with the digital signature on the indicia.

2 The method of claim 1 further including the steps of:

assigning a secret key to each of the groups, and

encrypting the verification keys assigned to each group as a function of the secret key

and the different geographic designations.

3 The method of claim 2 further including the steps of:

generating a master key; and

encrypting the key ID as a function of the master key, the geographic designation,

and a designation of the group.

4 The method of claim 3 further including the step of generating and printing indicia for postage on a mail piece that is to be received at a plurality of distribution centers.

1
1 5 The method of claim 4 further including the step of verifying the indicia at a destination
2 distribution center.

1
1 6 The method of claim 4 further including the step of verifying the indicia at an originating
2 distribution center.

1
1 7 The method of claim 3 further including the step of using zip codes to represent the
2 geographic designations.

1
1
1 8 The method of claim 1 further including the step of generating and printing indicia for
2 tickets.

1
1
1 9 A method for evidencing payment of postage using secret key cryptography in a system
2 including a plurality of postage generating devices that are divided into groups, each of the
3 postage generating devices for generating postage indicia for mail destined for
4 predetermined postal destinations, the method comprising the steps of:

5 (a) assigning a plurality of verification keys to each indicia generating device in
6 each of the groups, wherein each of the verification keys assigned to each of
7 the groups is encrypted as a function of a respective ;
8 (b) associating a key ID with each of the verification keys and encrypting each
9 key ID as a function of the same destination used to encrypt the

10 corresponding verification key;

11 (c) requiring that verifiers of the postage indicia perform postal verification at the

12 plurality of destinations, where each verifier services a respective destination;

13 (d) distributing to each respective destination verifier, the verification keys and

14 the key ID's that were encrypted as a function of the corresponding

15 destination; and

16 (e) requiring each of the postage generating devices to evidence the postage

17 indicia for a mail piece destined for a particular destination by

18 (i) generating one of the verification keys and the corresponding key ID

19 assigned to its group based on that particular destination, and

20 (ii) using the generated verification key to create a digital signature, and

21 digitally signing the indicia by including the digital signature and the

22 generated key ID on the indicia, such that when the mail is received at

23 the predetermined destination, the verifier uses the key ID on the

24 indicia and the distributed verifications keys to compute a digital

25 signature, and compares the computed digital signature with the

26 digital signature on the postage indicia to verify the postage indicia.

1
10 The method of claim 9 further including the steps of:

2 assigning a secret key to each of the groups, and

3 encrypting the verification keys assigned to each group as a function of the secret key

4 and the plurality of destinations.

1 11 The method of claim 10 further including the steps of:
2 generating a master key; and
3 encrypting the key ID as a function of the master key, the destination, and a
4 designation of the group.

1
1 12 The method of claim 11 further including the step of performing postage verification
2 onsite at a destination distribution center.

1
1 13 The method of claim 12 further including the step of performing postage verification by
2 a third party that is in remote communication with the destination distribution center.

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1 14 The method as in claim 13 wherein the verifier further performs the steps of using the
2 key ID to retrieve the corresponding verification key used to originally create the digital
3 signature.

1
1 15 A system for evidencing payment of postage using secret key cryptography, comprising:
2 a plurality of postage generating devices that are divided into groups, each of the
3 postage generating devices for generating postage indicia for mail destined
4 for predetermined postal destinations;
5 a plurality of distribution centers for verifying the postage indicia, where each
6 distribution center services at least one of the postage destinations; and
7 a key distribution center in communication with the plurality of postage generating

8 devices and with the plurality of distribution centers, the key distribution
9 center for performing the functions of:

10 assigning a plurality of verification keys to each indicia generating
11 device in each of the groups, wherein each of the verification
12 keys assigned to each of the groups is encrypted as a function
13 of a respective destination, and for associating a key ID with
14 each of the verification keys and encrypting each key ID as a
15 function of the same destination used to encrypt the
16 corresponding verification key, and

17 distributing to each of the plurality of distribution centers, the
18 verification keys and the key ID's encrypted as a function of
19 the destination the distribution center services,

20 wherein in response to a request to generate indicia for a mail piece destined for a
21 particular destination, each of the postage generating devices generates one of
22 the verification keys and the corresponding key ID assigned to its group
23 based on that particular destination, and uses the generated verification key to
24 create a digital signature for the indicia, such that when the mail is received at
25 the distribution center servicing the predetermined destination, the key ID
26 from the indicia and the verification keys distributed to the distribution center
27 are used to verify the digital signature on the postage indicia.

1
1 16 The system of claim 15 wherein the key distribution center further generates a master
2 key, and a secret key for each of the postage generating devices groups, and distributes the

3 master key and the secret key to the respective postage generating devices within each of the
4 groups.

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2 17 The system of claim 16 wherein the verification keys assigned to each group are
encrypted as a function of the secret key and the plurality of destinations.

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2 18 The system of claim 17 further wherein the key ID is encrypted as a function of the
master key, the destination, and a designation of the group.

1
2 19 The system of claim 18 wherein verification of the postage is performed onsite at the
destination distribution centers.

1
2 20 The system of claim 19 wherein verification of the postage is performed by a third party
that is in remote communication with the destination distribution centers.

1
2 21 The system as in claim 20 wherein the indicia is verified by using the key ID from the
indicia to retrieve the corresponding verification key used to originally create the digital
signature, wherein the retrieved verification key is used to compute the digital signature for
the indicia and the computed digital signature is compared with the digital signature from
the indicia.

1
2 22 A computer-readable media containing program instructions for evidencing payment of
postage using secret key cryptography in a system including a plurality of postage

3 generating devices that are divided into groups, each of the postage generating devices for
4 generating postage indicia for mail destined for predetermined postal destinations from
5 among a plurality of destinations, the program instructions for:

6 (a) assigning a plurality of verification keys to each indicia generating device in
7 each of the groups, wherein each of the verification keys assigned to each of
8 the groups is encrypted as a function of a respective destination;
9 (b) associating a key ID with each of the verification keys and encrypting each
10 key ID as a function of the same destination used to encrypt the
11 corresponding verification key;
12 (c) requiring that verifiers of the postage indicia perform postal verification at the
13 plurality of destinations, where each verifier services a respective destination;
14 (d) distributing to each respective destination verifier, the verification keys and
15 the key ID's that were encrypted as a function of the corresponding
16 destination; and
17 (e) requiring each of the postage generating devices to evidence the postage
18 indicia for a mail piece destined for a particular destination by
19 (i) generating one of the verification keys and the corresponding key ID
20 assigned to its group based on that particular destination, and
21 (ii) using the generated verification key to create a digital signature, and
22 digitally signing the indicia by including the digital signature and the
23 generated key ID on the indicia, such that when the mail is received at
24 the predetermined destination, the verifier uses the key ID on the
25 indicia and the distributed verifications keys to compute a digital

signature, and compares the computed digital signature with the digital signature on the postage indicia to verify the postage indicia.

23 The computer-readable media of claim 22 further including the instructions of:

2 assigning a secret key to each of the groups, and

3 encrypting the verification keys assigned to each group as a function of the secret key
4 and the plurality of destinations.

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24 The computer-readable media of claim 23 further including the instructions of:

generating a master key; and

encrypting the key ID as a function of the master key, the destination, and a designation of the group.

1

25 The computer-readable media of claim 24 further including the instruction of performing postage verification onsite at a destination distribution center.

1

26 The computer-readable media of claim 25 further including the instruction of performing postage verification by a third party that is in remote communication with the destination distribution center.

1

27 The computer-readable media as in claim 26 further including the instructions of using the key ID to retrieve the corresponding verification key used to originally create the digital signature.

1
2 28 A method for generating and distributing cryptographic keys for postage evidencing and
3 verification in a system where mail is destined for predetermined postal destinations ,
4 wherein each of the postal destinations is serviced by a postal distribution center, the method
comprising the steps of:

5 (a) creating a master secret key K;

6 (b) dividing a plurality of postage generating devices (PGDs) that generate
postage indicia for mail into n groups G_i , $i = 1,...n$;

7 (c) assigning each PDG group, G_i , a secret key K_i ;

8 (d) generating a set of n verification keys, V_i^{Dest} , $i = 1,...,n$, for each PGD group
 G_i , where each of the verification keys is calculated as a function of a
respective postal destination (Dest);

9 (e) generating a set of key ID's, I_i^{Dest} , $i = 1,...,n$, where each key ID corresponds
to one of the verification keys and is also generated as a function the same
postal destination used to calculate the corresponding verification key;

10 (f) transferring to each distribution center, the verification keys V_i^{Dest} and key
ID's I_i^{Dest} that were calculated as a function of the destination serviced by
the distribution center; and

11 (g) transferring the master secret key K and the secret key K_i to all PGD's in
group G_i , such that each PGD, when evidencing indicia for the mail destined
for one of the predetermined postal destination, generates one of the
verification keys based on the predetermined postal destination to create a

22 digital signature for the indicia.

1

1 29 The method of claim 28 further including the step of computing each verification key
2 V_i^{Dest} as a one-way function H of the PGD group key K_i , and a designation of the postal
3 destination:

$$V_i^{Dest} = H(K_i, Dest).$$

1

30 The method of claim 29 further including the step of using ZIP codes to designate the plurality of postal destinations.

31 The method of claim 30 further including the step of computing each of the key ID's as a one-way function H of the PGD group, G_i , the master secret key, K , and a designation of the postal destination, $Dest$:

$$I_i^{Dest} = H(K, Dest, G_i).$$

1

1 32 A method for verifying postage indicia on a mail piece received at a postal distribution
2 center that services a particular postal region, comprising the steps of:

3 (a) receiving and storing a set of verification keys V_i^{Dest} and a set of key ID's
4 I_i^{Dest} identifying the verification keys, wherein the verification keys and the
5 key ID's were generated as a function of the postal region;

6 (b) in response to receiving the mail piece, determining the mail piece's postal
7 region;

8 (c) if the distribution center is not within the mail piece's destination region,
9 transferring the mail piece to the distribution center within the mail piece's
10 postal region; and
11 (d) if the distribution center is within the mail piece's postal region, verifying the
12 postage indicia by
13 (i) reading a digital signature and a key ID from the indicia,
14 (ii) using the key ID read from the indicia to retrieve the corresponding
15 verification key from the stored set of verification keys,
16 (iii) using the retrieved verification key to compute a digital signature for
17 the indicia, and
18 (iv) comparing the computed digital signature with the digital signature
19 read from the postage indicia to verify the indicia.

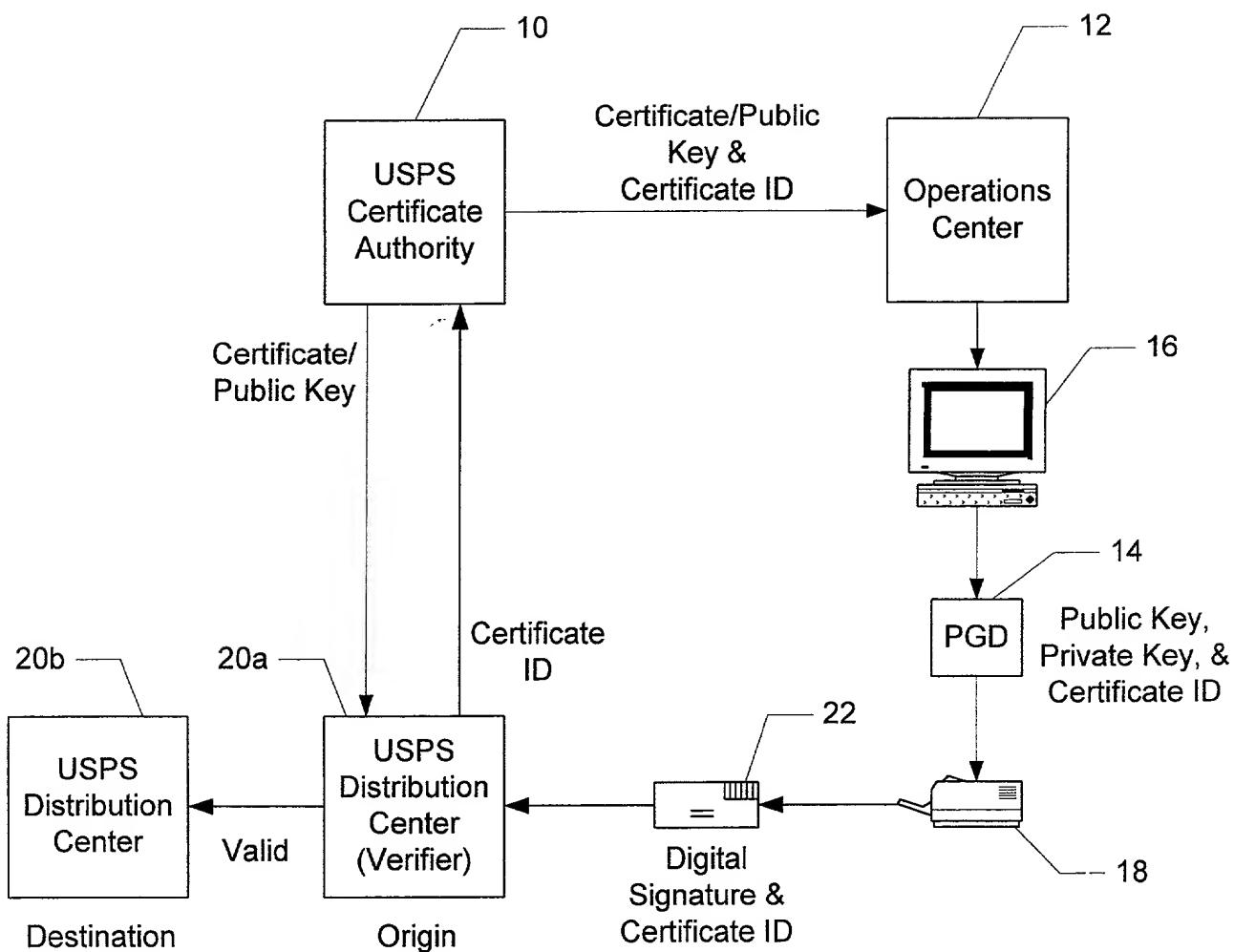
33 The method of claim 32 further including the step of determining the mail piece's postal
2 region based on a zip code.

1 34 The method of claim 33 further including the step of determining the mail piece's postal
2 region based on a destination zip code.

1 35 The method of claim 33 further including the step of determining the mail piece's postal
2 region based on a return address zip code.

ABSTRACT

A method and system for evidencing payment of indicia using secret key cryptography is disclosed. The method and system include a plurality of indicia generating devices that are divided into groups for generating and printing indicia on a media that is to be received at a plurality of establishments, wherein the establishments are associated with different geographic designations. The method and system include assigning a plurality of verification keys to each indicia generating device in each of the groups, wherein each of the verification keys assigned to each of the groups is encrypted as a function of a respective geographic designation. A key ID is associated with each of the verification keys and is encrypted as a function of the same geographic designation used to encrypt the corresponding verification key. After the verification keys and key ID's are assigned, each one of the establishments receives the verification keys and the key ID's that were encrypted as a function of the geographic designation associated with the establishment. When generating indicia for media destined for a particular one of the establishments, the indicia generating devices evidence the indicia by generating one of the verification keys and the corresponding key ID assigned to indicia generating device's group based on the geographic designation associated with the particular establishment, and uses the generated verification key to create a digital signature. The indicia generating devices digitally sign the indicia by including the digital signature and the generated key ID in the indicia. Upon receiving the media at the particular establishment, the indicia on the media is verified by using the key ID on the indicia and the distributed verifications keys to compute a digital signature, and comparing the computed digital signature with the digital signature on the indicia.



PRIOR ART

FIG. 1

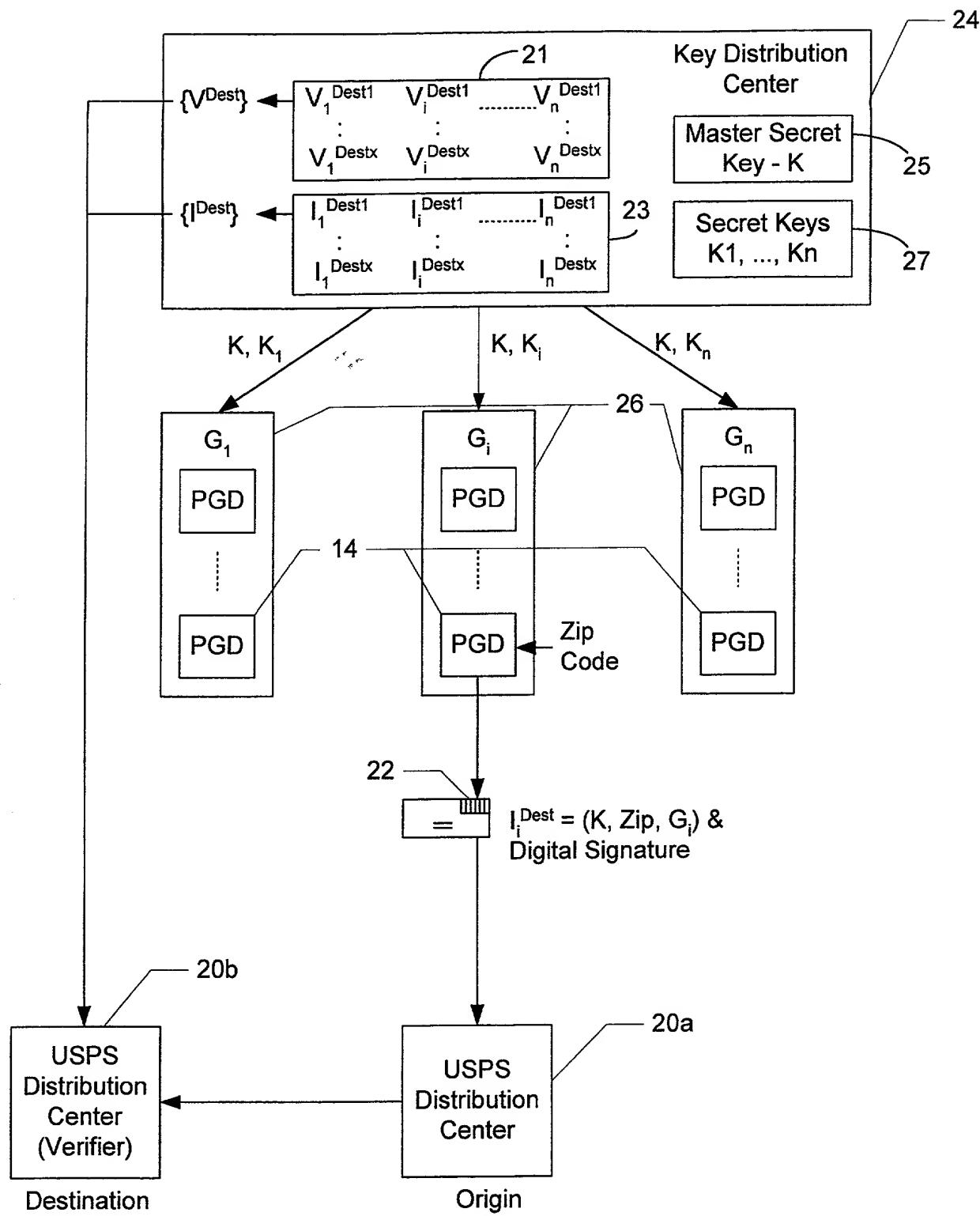


FIG. 2

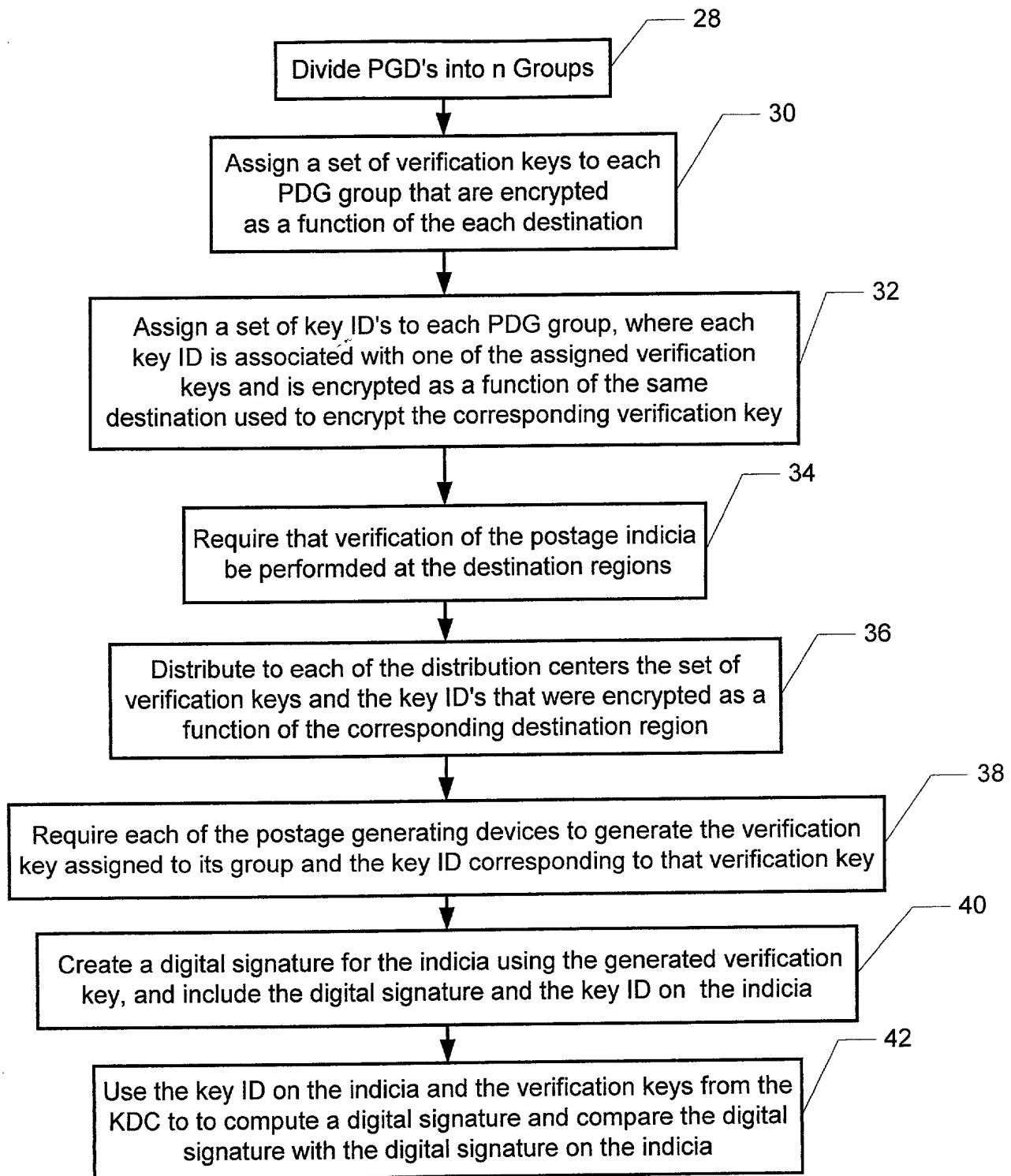
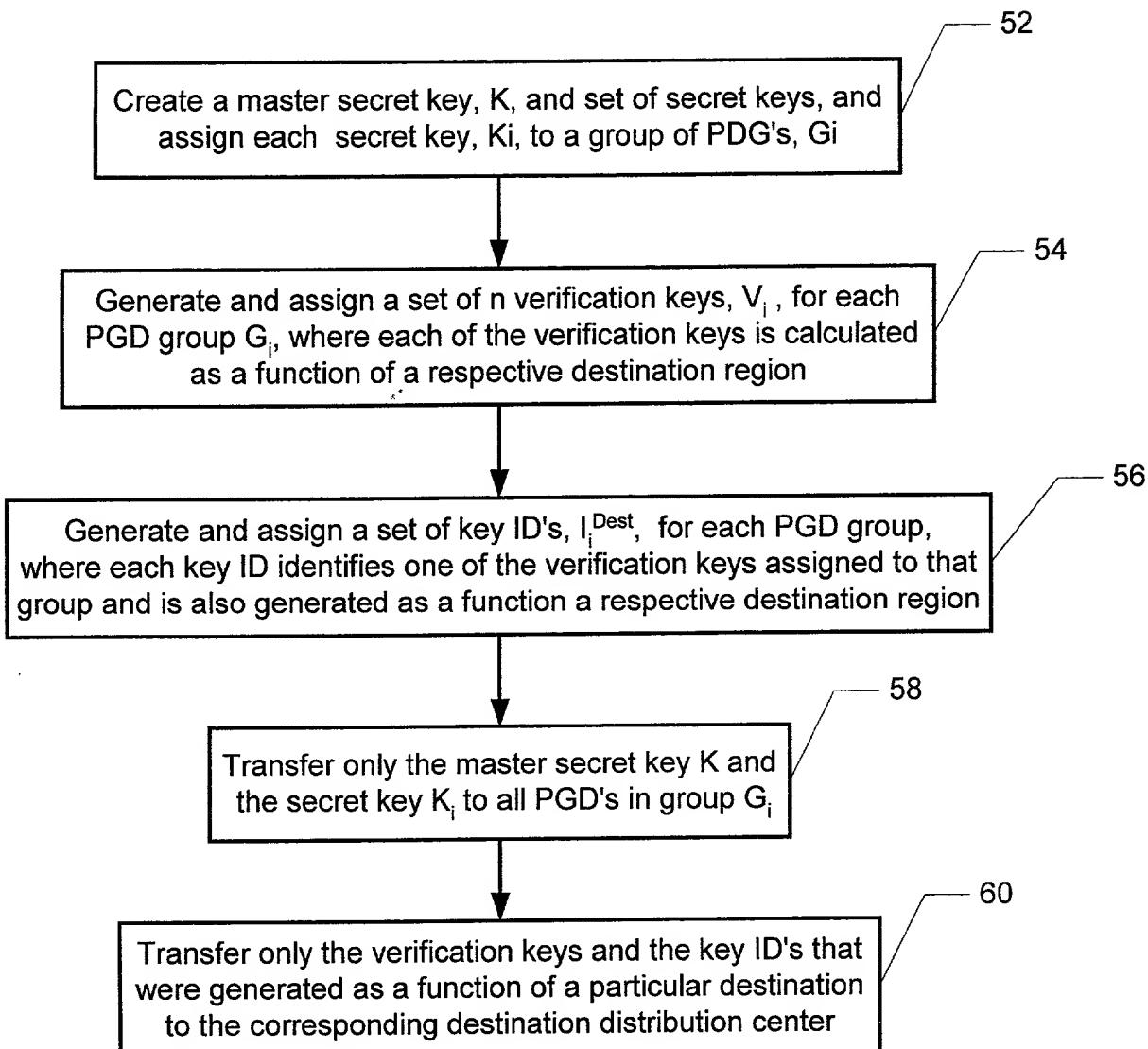
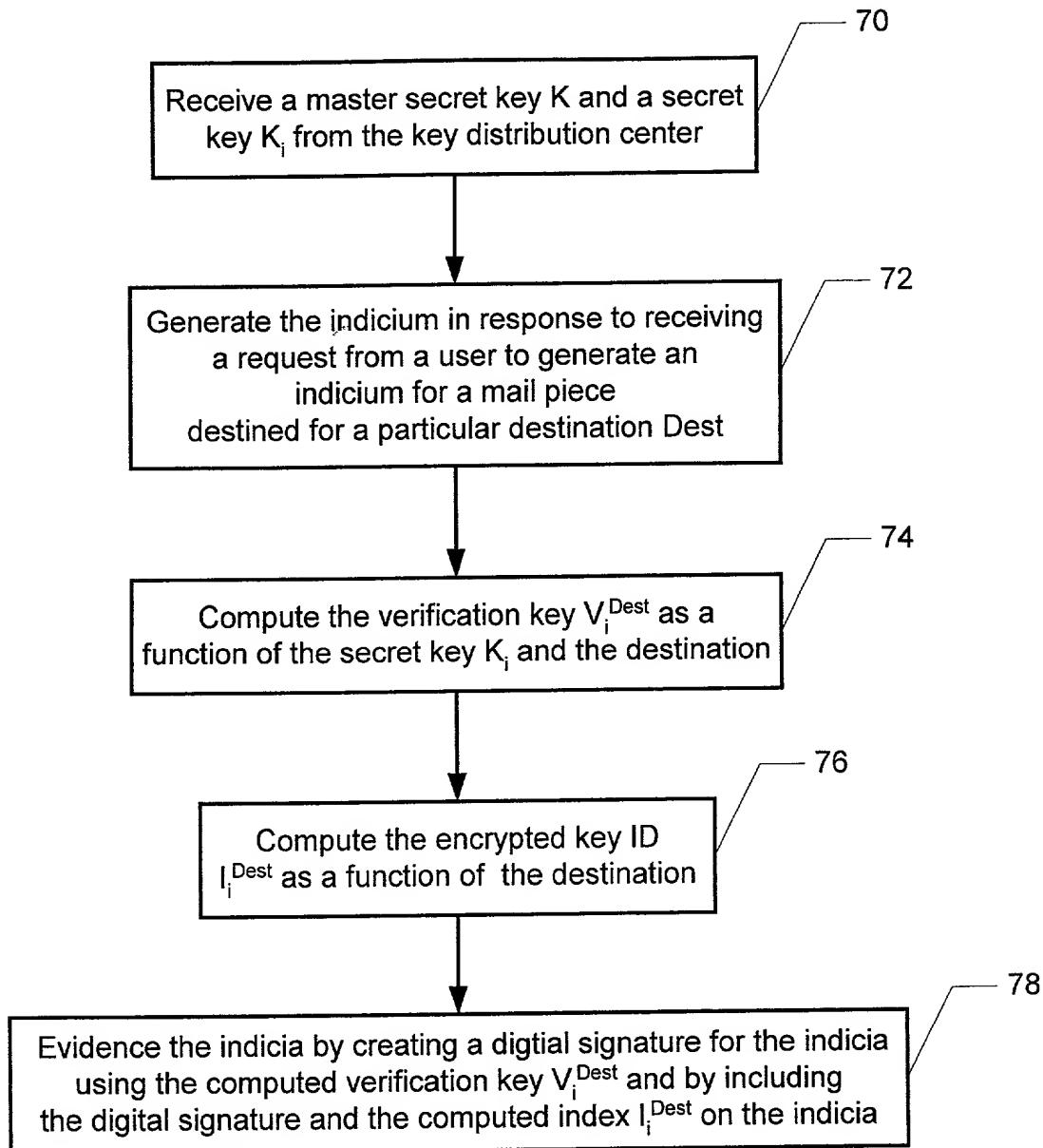


FIG. 3



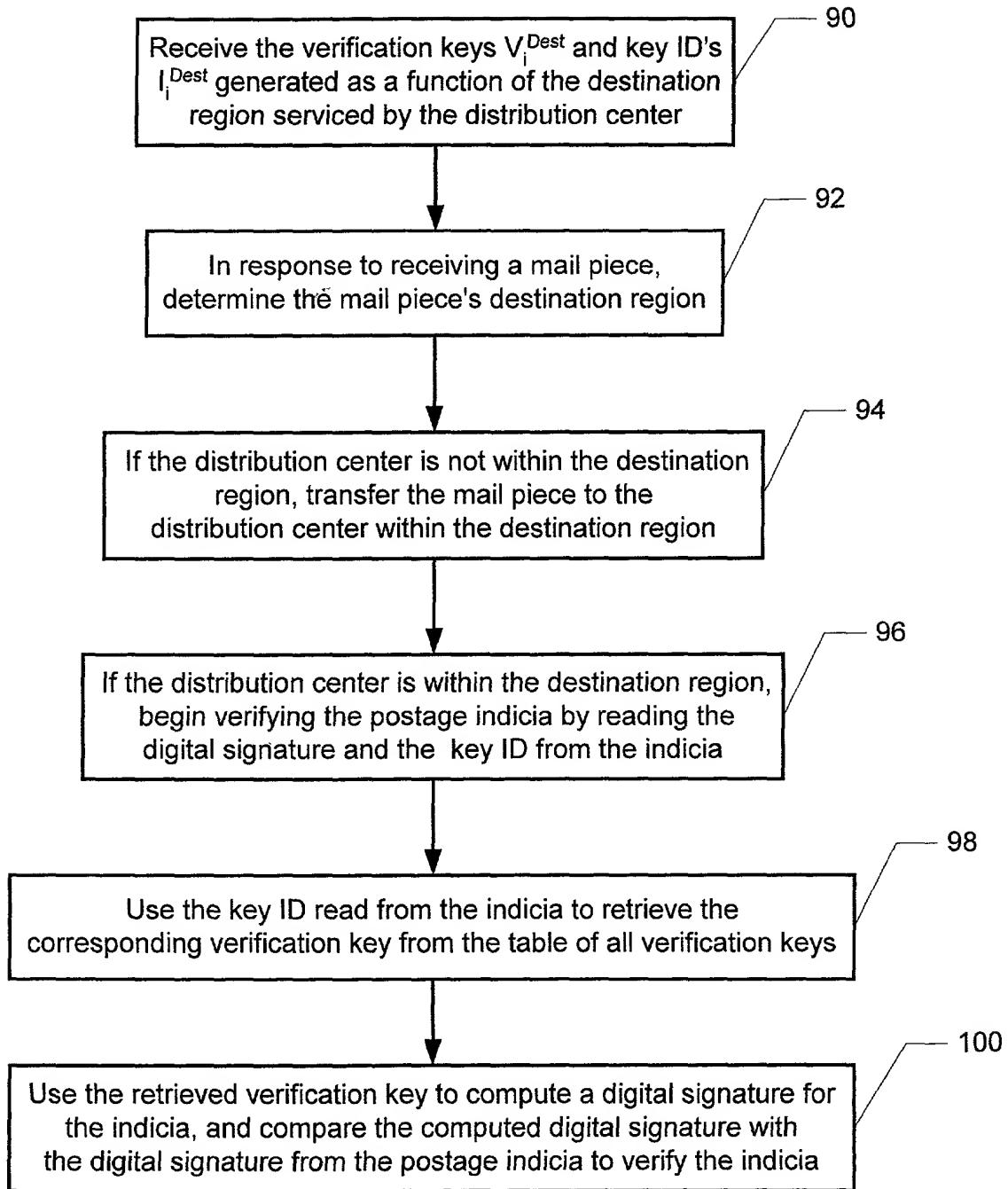
Generation and Distribution of Keys

FIG. 4



Dispensing & Evidencing Postage Indicia

FIG. 5



Verifying Postage Indicia

FIG. 6

DECLARATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY FOR UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that:

My residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated below, next to my name,

I believe that I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or an original, first and joint inventor (if plural names are listed below) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled

EVIDENCING AND VERIFYING INDICIA OF VALUE USING SECRET KEY CRYPTOGRAPHY

the specification of which

X is attached hereto.
 was filed on _____.

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above-identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above. I do not know and do not believe that the same was ever known or used in the United States of America before my invention thereof, or patented or described in any printed publication in any country before my invention thereof or more than one year prior to this application, that the same was not in public use or on sale in the United States of America more than one year prior to this application, and said invention has not been patented or made the subject of an inventor's certificate issued before the date of this application in any country foreign to the United States of America on an application filed by me or my legal representatives or assigns more than twelve months prior to this application.

I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to the examination of this application in accordance with Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 1.56 (a).

I hereby claim foreign priority benefits under Title 35, United States Code, Section 119, of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate listed below and have also identified below any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed:

<u>Prior Foreign Application(s)</u>	<u>Priority Claimed</u>
-------------------------------------	-------------------------

(Number)	(Country)	(Day/Month/Year Filed)	Yes	No
(Number)	(Country)	(Day/Month/Year Filed)	Yes	No

I hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code, Section 120 of any United States application(s) listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States application in the manner provided by the first paragraph of Title 35, United States Code, Section 112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose material information as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 1.56(a) which occurred between the filing date of the prior application and the national or PCT international filing date of this application:

(Application Serial No.)	(Filing Date)	(Status-patented, pending, abandoned)
(Application Serial No.)	(Filing Date)	(Status-patented, pending, abandoned)

Attorney Docket: 1775P
Page 2 of 2

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I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

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Date

6/30/00

Signature

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